



Ancient Egypt:

'The Second Intermediate Period' or

The Second 'Interregnum':

The War between the Theban Egyptians and the Hyksos:

Primary Sources:

'The Autobiography of Ahmose, Son of Abana',

Naval Commander under Pharaoh Ahmose the First,

As painstakingly translated by the eminent Egyptologist

Kurt Heinrich Sethe (1869–1934),

and edited by Dr. Mark Jan Nederhof

This small e-book contains one of the texts found on the walls of the tomb of Ahmose, Son of Abana (a name sometimes transliterated into English as Ebana or Ibana). This singular ancient Egyptian composition is known to us today as *The Autobiography of Ahmose, Son of Abana*.

This document was first published online by the undersigned in October 2024.

Front page illustration: A depiction of Ahmose and his wife, Ipu, found on one of the walls of his tomb at El-Kab.

“l.p.h.!” is an abbreviation for “Life – Prosperity – Health” (or rather for the English translation of the equivalent Egyptian terms) – a kind of reverential exclamation frequently added to mentions of the name or the person of a pharaoh, similar to the one customarily added to the name of the Prophet Muhammad by pious Muslims (“Peace be upon Him”).

[...] denote lacunae in the surviving hieroglyphic lines on the walls of Ahmose's tomb.

Significant additions to the text of the original translation have been put within {curly brackets}, and have sometimes also been marked with the initials of the undersigned, i.e. with “E.S.”, for the sake of clarity.

The Autobiography of Ahmose, Son of Abana

Naval Commander under Pharaoh Ahmose the First

From the walls of his rock-cut resting place at El-Kab/Al-Kab (the ancient Nekhen or Hierakonpolis) in Upper Egypt

First discovered by Napoleon's 'Egyptian Expedition', in 1799

Containing a first-hand account of the battle before the walls of Avaris, Capital of the Hyksos

Kurt Heinrich Sethe's translation

Source:

Ahmose, Son of Abana. (2014). *The Autobiography of Ahmose, Son of Abana* (Kurt Sethe, Trans., Mark-Jan Nederhof, Ed.). Retrieved from <https://mjn.host.cs.st-andrews.ac.uk/egyptian/texts/corpus/pdf/>

Start of translation (quote):

Naval commander Ahmose, son of Abana, justified, says:

“I speak to you, all people. I will let you know the favours that were granted to me. I have been rewarded with gold seven times before the entire land, and with male and female slaves as well. I have been endowed with very many fields. The name of a brave man is in what he has done, without ever perishing in this land.” He says:

“I grew up in the town of Nekheb.

My father was a soldier of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Seqenenre, justified,
and was called Baba, son of Rainet.

Then I became a soldier in his place, on the ship 'The Wild Bull',
in the time of the lord of the Two Lands Nebpehtire {Ahmose I}, justified.
I was a young man, before I had married, and I slept in a hammock of net.
After I had established a household,
I was taken to the ship 'The Northern', because I was brave.
Then I followed the sovereign (l.p.h.!) on foot
after him riding on this chariot.

When the town of Avaris was besieged,

I showed valour on foot in His Majesty's presence
Then I was assigned to 'Rising in Memphis',
and there was fighting on the water in Padjedku of Avaris.
Then I made a capture and carried off a hand.
When it was reported to the royal herald, I was given gold of valour.
Then there was more fighting in this place,
again I made a capture there and carried off a hand,
and again I was given gold of valour.

Then there was fighting in Egypt south of this town,
and I brought away a man as captive. I went down into the water,
for he was captured on the side of the town,
and crossed the water carrying him. When it was reported to the royal herald,
I was rewarded with gold once more.

Then Avaris was captured, and I brought booty from there:
one man and three women, altogether four people.
And His Majesty {Ahmose I} gave them to me for slaves.

Then Sharahen {or Sharuhén, a city which was likely located in what is now south-western Israel}
was besieged for three years, and His Majesty captured it.

Then I brought booty from there: two women and a hand.
I was given gold of valour,
and I was given the captives for slaves.

After His Majesty had slain the bedouin tribes of Asia {an ancient term for the Levant},
he sailed southward to Khent-hen-nefer
to destroy the Nubian nomads,
and His Majesty carried out a large massacre among them.

Then I brought booty from there:
two living men and three hands. I was rewarded with gold once more,
and two female slaves were given to me. His Majesty sailed northward,
rejoicing in strength and victory, having captured southerners and northerners.

Then Aata came to the south, and his fate brought on his doom,
when the gods of Upper Egypt grasped him. He was found by His Majesty at Tent-ta-o,
and His Majesty brought him away as captive
and all his people as booty.

Then I brought two warriors as captives from the ship of Aata.
I was given five people and five arourae of land in my town,
and the same was done for the whole crew.

Then that enemy called Tetian came,
who had drawn together rebels. His Majesty slew him
and his troop was annihilated.
Then I was given three people and five arourae of land in my town.

Then I conveyed the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Djeserkare, justified,
as he sailed southward to Kush
to widen the borders of Egypt.

Then His Majesty smote that Nubian nomad
in the midst of his army, taken in a stranglehold, none missing,

the fleeing were felled as though they had never been.

Now, I was in the van of our army, where I fought properly,
and His Majesty saw my valour.

I carried off two hands, and presented them to His Majesty.

Then his people and his cattle were pursued.

I brought a captive and presented him to His Majesty.

I brought His Majesty to Egypt from Upper Well in two days,
and I was rewarded with gold. Then I brought away two female slaves as booty,
in addition to those I had presented to His Majesty
Then I was appointed to be warrior-of-the-ruler.

Then I conveyed the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Aakheperkare, justified,
as he sailed southward to Khent-hen-nefer,
to crush rebellion throughout the lands,
and to drive off intrusion from the desert region.
I showed valour in his presence at the cataract,
during the towing of the fleet through the eddy.

Then I was appointed to be naval commander.

Then His Majesty (l.p.h.!) [...] and His Majesty became as enraged as a panther.

His Majesty shot and his first arrow stuck in the chest of that enemy.

Then these [...] [...] despondent on account of his uraeus.

It was done there in an act of massacre,

and their people were brought away as captives. His Majesty sailed northward,
all foreign lands in his grasp.

That wretched Nubian nomad hung with his head downward
from the prow of the falcon-ship of His Majesty.

One landed at Karnak.

**Thereafter one proceeded to Retjenu {or Palestine/Canaan},
to vent his {righteous} fury throughout the lands.**

When His Majesty reached Naharina {the Kingdom of the Mitanni, an Indo-European people – later on, Mitanni kings would give their daughters in marriage to Egyptian pharaohs},
His Majesty (l.p.h.!) found that enemy marshalling troops,
and His Majesty carried out a large massacre among them.
Countless were the captives that His Majesty brought away from his victories.
Now, I was in the van of our army, and His Majesty saw my valour.
I brought away a chariot, its horse, and him who was on it as captive,
and presented them to His Majesty. I was rewarded with gold once more.

The favours towards me are as before [...] beloved [...] I rest in the tomb that I myself
[...] [...] [...] [...] in Behi. Again I was given by the king of Upper and Lower
Egypt [...] 60 arourae in Hadjaa, altogether [...] arourae.

List of names of the male and female slaves from the booty given to me:

male slave Pamedjai; male slave Pajabdjui; male slave Senebnebef;
male slave [...]; male slave Qenpakheqa; male slave Djehutisenebu;
male slave Sobekmes; male slave Kharai; male slave Paam; female slave Taa;
female slave Sedjemesni; female slave Baket; female slave Ka[...]isi;
female slave Taametju; female slave Wabentasachmet;
female slave Istarajumi; female slave Itnefer;
female slave Hadetkush; female slave Amunhersedeneb.

{End of Autobiography of Ahmose, Son of Abana}

{Emphasis added}

Addendum:

Excerpt from the “Additions and Notes: Notes on the Exodus” section of Brugsch's *A History of Egypt under the Pharaohs* (Editorial footnote)

(8) See the interesting description of these ruins by Mr. Greville Chester (ut sup. cit. p. 148): 'Tel-el-Hir marks the site of a town of large extent and considerable importance, and its surface is strewn with innumerable sherds of pottery, ancient glass of fine quality, and bits of hewn stone ' (some of which seem to be window frames). On the west side of the Tel, the side farthest from the desert, rise the remains of a massive square tower, each of whose sides measures about 94 paces [one pace being c. 0.76 meters]. The north, south, and western sides of this fortress descend into an immense desiccated lake or marsh. The eastern side of the tower, which is built of crude brick, is joined to the rest of the sandy Tel, which extends eastwards to the desert. ... It is at once evident to the eye that this was an important frontier fortress.'

This answers in all respects to the Hyksos' frontier fortress of Hau'ar (Avaris), which has been already described in the History (Vol. I, pp. 23–67). It stood at the N.E. frontier of Egypt, on the right side of the Pelusiac arm of the Nile, and had on its west side either a lake or estuary (the 'Pa-zetku of Avaris') on which the sailor Aahmes [the name of an Egyptian soldier who left a personal account of his battles with the Hyksos, a name now usually transliterated into English as Ahmose, which, in this case, does not refer to the famous Pharaoh Amasis or Ahmose, Liberator of Egypt from the Hyksos yoke, but, as indicated, to a mariner] fought under the king his namesake in a naval battle with the Hyksos, and also water on its south side. (Vol. I. pp. 28–45.)

(Brugsch-Bey, 1881, pp. 427–429)

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